

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRAGUE 00196 250732Z
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH FEDERAL MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

1. SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 18 AMBASSADOR, ACCOMPANIED BY AGATT, MADE AN INTRODUCTORY CALL ON CZECHOSLOVAK FEDERAL MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE NAGR WHICH LASTED NINETY MINUTES. MEETING WAS MOST CORDIAL AND FRIENDLY. NAGR DISCUSSED AT LENGTH GENERAL AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SITUATION. ALTHOUGH MEETING PRODUCED LITTLE NEW INFORMATION, IT DID REVEAL NAGR'S PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF WIDE RANGE OF AGRICULTURAL MATTERS. HIS COMMENTS ON FOOD PRICES ALSO NOTEWORTHY. AT END OF DISCUSSION, NAGR AND HIS FOREIGN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT CHIEF ROSA PROMISED TO DO THEIR BEST TO ASSURE MORE ACCESS FOR AGATT TO APPROPRIATE MINAG OFFICIALS IN THE FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DISCUSSING FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SITUATION FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND ITS DEGREE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY, NAGR SAID THAT SUBJECT MUST BE DISCUSSED WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO MEAT CONSUMPTION. CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS NEARLY SELF SUFFICIENT IN MEAT SINCE IT IMPORTS ONLY ABOUT THREE PERCENT OF ITS DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. HOWEVER, HE SAID, THIS
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PAGE 02 PRAGUE 00196 250732Z

IS NOT THE BEST MEASURE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY. CZECHOSLOVAKIA STILL IMPORTS LARGE AMOUNTS OF GRAIN AND VEGETABLE AND ANIMAL PROTEINS FOR FEED TO SUSTAIN THE GROWTH OF ITS LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY. NAGR ESTIMATED 1977 IMPORTS AT 400,000 TONS OF GRAIN, 600,000 TONS OF SOYBEAN AND PEANUT MEAL AND 40,000 TONS OF FISH MEAL. ALTHOUGH PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION OF MEAT REACHED 83 KG., AMONG HIGHEST IN EUROPE, CONTINUING RISING DOMESTIC DEMAND MAKES SELF-

SUFFICIENCY AN ELUSIVE GOAL.

3. THE MINISTER CLAIMED THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS SELF-SUFFICIENT IN MOST OTHER AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES AND EVEN EXPORTS MALTING BARLEY, HOPS, POTATOES (IN SOME YEARS) AND EGGS. SUGAR HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT EXPORT EARNER, BUT THIS YEAR ITS SALES PROSPECTS ARE NOT PROMISING BECAUSE OF DEPRESSED WORLD PRICES--A FRUSTRATION TO PRAGUE, SINCE SOME 860,000 TONS ARE EXPECTED IN THIS YEAR'S PRODUCTION.

4. NAGR FULLY AWARE OF TECHNICAL ADVANCES ATTAINED BY THE U.S. IN AGRICULTURE. HE WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED THAT A CZECHOSLOVAK LIVESTOCK EXPERT TEAM WAS ABLE TO VISIT THE U.S. IN 1977. HE READ THE TEAM'S REPORT WITH INTEREST AND WAS SURE IT WILL BE OF GREAT VALUE FOR THEM.

5. ASKED ABOUT FOOD PRICES, NAGR DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN STAPLE AND NON-STAPLE ITEMS. COFFEE, TEA AND OTHER IMPORTED ITEMS ARE NOT STAPLES, AND THEIR PRICES WILL REFLECT WORLD LEVELS. PRICES FOR MEAT AND POTATOES, PRESUMABLY ALONG WITH OTHER (UNNAMED) STAPLES, WILL BE KEPT LOW AND STABLE, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING. DUE TO WORLD ENERGY SITUATION AND OTHER EXTERNAL FACTORS, NO ONE CAN PREDICT DOMESTIC FOOD PRICES IN LONGER RUN, NAGR SAID. BREAD AND FLOUR ARE NOT CONSIDERED STAPLES SINCE PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION IS FALLING.

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PAGE 03 PRAGUE 00196 250732Z

6. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED ABOUT PRIVATE HOLDINGS, AND NAGR REPLIED THAT APPROXIMATELY FOUR PERCENT OF ALL AVAILABLE LAND IS IN PRIVATE HANDS. UNITS USUALLY RANGE UP TO TEN HECTARES; IN SOME INSTANCES EVEN MORE. THE PROPORTION OF PRIVATELY HELD LAND VARIES BY REGION. IN SOME DISTRICTS, MAINLY MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF MORAVIA AND SLOVAKIA, UP TO FIFTEEN PERCENT OF THE LAND MAY BE PRIVATELY HELD.

7. WHEN AMBASSADOR RAISED QUESTION OF DIFFICULT ACCESS BY AGATT TO APPROPRIATE MINAG OFFICIALS IN THE PAST, NAGR APPEARED SOMEWHAT SURPRISED. ROSA, THE HEAD OF HIS FOREIGN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT, QUICKLY EXPLAINED APOLOGETICALLY THAT OTHER PREOCCUPATIONS OF APPROPRIATE MINAG OFFICIALS HAD PRECLUDED MEETING WITH AGATT IN RECENT PAST. RATHER THAN REDUCE LEVEL OF DISCUSSIONS WITH PERSON HAVING INFERIOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAK AGRICULTURE, THEY DECIDED TO CANCEL APPOINTMENTS FOR AGATT. ROSA PROMISED HE WILL DO HIS BEST TO ASSURE AGATT GETS APPROPRIATE CONTACTS IN FUTURE. NAGR ADDED CONTACTS NEED NOT ALWAYS FOLLOW STRICT PROTOCOL FORMALITIES.

8. COMMENT: WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHETHER FRIENDLY RECEPTION AND UNUSUAL LENGTH OF VISIT REFLECT POSSIBLE CHANGE OF ATTITUDE OF GOC

TOWARD CONTACTS WITH U.S. OFFICIALS. THE CORDIAL RECEPTION, WHILE NOT SURPRISING, MAY HAVE ALSO REFLECTED ADMISSION OF A FORM OF "GUILT" FOR RESPONDING SO SLOWLY TO AMBASSADOR'S REPEATED REQUESTS FOR APPOINTMENT WITH NAGR. THE MAIN VALUE WE SEE FROM THIS MEETING IS THAT WE MAY HAVE ESTABLISHED A MORE DIRECT DIALOGUE WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND MOST OF ALL MADE THEM AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE AND INTEREST WE ATTACH TO AGRICULTURAL MATTERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. WE HOPE THIS MEETING WILL FACILITATE INCREASED CONTACTS BETWEEN MINAG AND U.S. AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS IN THE FUTURE. DECONTROL FOLLOWING RECEIPT.
BYRNE

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